

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 17, 2019

CONTACT:

Ellen Kazary, Executive Director
Great Land Trust
ellen@greatlandtrust.org
(907) 278-4998

New Public Recreation Area Created in Valdez

Great Land Trust Facilitates Conservation and Transfer of 184 Acres to the City of Valdez to be Used for Public Recreation

Valdez, AK-

Valdez has gained a new public recreation area. Great Land Trust recently facilitated both the purchase of 184 acres of land using *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill (EVOS) Trustee Council funds and the subsequent transfer of the land to the City of Valdez.

The property, known as Meals Hill and located adjacent to the Valdez Ferry Terminal, is now permanently protected by a conservation easement, ensuring it will remain open to the public for recreation and that its valuable wildlife habitat will remain undeveloped.

Meals Hill is a prominent landscape feature in Valdez, providing open space, habitat, and recreational opportunities adjacent to downtown Valdez. The property sits atop a unique bedrock feature, standing above the city. It also contains undisturbed coastal rain forest, one mile of rocky coastline, and wetlands in the low-lying areas between the parallel ridges of the hill. There is an existing gravel road, accessible to both hikers and walkers, which leads to an overlook at the summit of the property.

This new public recreation area is within walking distance of the Valdez Ferry Terminal, Civic Center Overlook Trail, and the coastal walkway to the Valdez Small Boat Harbor, making it easily reachable for non-motorized recreational opportunities. Other recreational uses of the property will include hiking, skiing, mountain biking, bird and wildlife viewing, and berry picking.

The Meals Hill property was highly ranked in a prioritization of lands with important habitat and resource value in the EVOS spill area. Many species and their habitat, as well as tourism and recreation resources, were damaged by the oil spill. This project permanently conserves habitat for impacted species, while also supporting tourism and recreation.

Great Land Trust, a non-profit founded by Alaskans for Alaskans with a mission to conserve the lands and waters essential to the quality of life and economic health of Alaskan communities, led the effort to conserve Meals Hill. Great Land Trust works with willing landowners, such as the Port of Valdez Company, which sold the property, and other partners, such as the EVOS Trustee

Council, which funded this project, to make projects like this a reality throughout Southcentral Alaska. The Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program, the State of Alaska, and the City of Valdez also collaborated on the project.

Historically, the land in and around Meals Hill was likely used by the Alaska Native Chugach and Ahtna tribes for fishing and trading as their people migrated to the north and south of current day Valdez.

In modern times, the history of Meals Hill dates back to gold mining days. George Cheever Hazelet and Andrew Jackson Meals arrived in Valdez in 1898 in search of gold. Not much gold was found, but Hazelet and Meals laid claim to some of the pristine and magnificent lands that they found. These two men were heavily involved in the founding of the City of Valdez, being early voices in the push to move the townsite from the “Old Town” to where it is today.

John Clark, President of the Port of Valdez Company, and great-grandson of Hazelet says, “Setting aside this property known as Meals Hill is a wonderful epitaph for these two visionary founders of Valdez. Meals and Hazelet would be proud to know that their legacy lives on in the conservation easement, to be enjoyed by the community of Valdez and those souls that are curious enough to visit.”

“Acquisition of the Meals Hill property for recreation and conservation use brings enormous value to the entire community of Valdez,” said Nicholas Farline, City of Valdez Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Director. “We look forward to partnering with local citizens over the next couple of years to develop a Meals Hill recreation plan which highlights the unique characteristics of the area and reflects what makes Valdez such an amazing place to live, work and play.”

The City of Valdez will manage the land as a city recreation area. The property can be accessed from the trailhead on Hazelet Avenue.

Great Land Trust is a non-profit founded by Alaskans for Alaskans whose mission is to conserve lands and waters essential to the quality of life and economic health of our communities. For more information visit our website at www.greatlandtrust.org.



Miners rowing towards shore in 1898 to offload mining supplies and start the trek over Valdez Glacier and into the Alaska gold fields. The dark piece of land is Meals Hill. *Photo courtesy of John Clark.*



Fat bikers compete in a race on Meals Hill at the Valdez Fat Bike Bash in 2017. *Photo by Eddie Clark Media/Valdez Adventure Alliance.*



Looking out across the bay from Meals Hill. *Photo by Amanda Hults/Great Land Trust.*



Meals Hill as viewed from the ferry. *Photo by Dave Mitchell/Great Land Trust.*